

# Veterans' Update

*Your quarterly newsletter on Veterans' Issues from  
Congresswoman Ginny Brown-Waite*

August, 2005

Greetings,

The Veterans' Update is a newsletter created to keep you abreast of issues and legislation important to the veterans of Florida's 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. I hope that you find this issue informative and educational. If you need any help with the benefits or care you receive from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), please do not hesitate to contact my Brooksville district office at 1-866-G-WAITE-5.

Sincerely,



Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite

## MEETING VETERANS' HEALTHCARE NEEDS IN THIS YEAR'S CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET

Every Member of Congress recognizes the pressing need to provide care for our returning troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. As you may have read in the news recently, however, the VA used a faulty, unrealistic and outdated budget model that drastically underestimated this year's demand for VA healthcare. That is why I strongly urged Congress to pass a \$1.5 billion veterans healthcare supplemental amendment to fund this budgetary shortfall.



Rep. Brown-Waite Meets With  
World War II Veterans About VA Healthcare

The good news is that in addition to meeting the short-term needs of veterans, the overall VA budget has increased 77 percent since 1995. This averages out to more than a seven percent increase per year. To put these increases into historical context, from 1965 to 1995 – from the Vietnam War to Operation Desert Storm – total annual veterans' spending in constant dollars grew an average of under two percent. And, from 1983 to 1993, total veterans' spending saw zero growth in constant dollars. When you step back and compare Congress's current efforts to provide veterans quality healthcare to periods in the past, it is clear that we have consistently met the funding needs of veterans.

That said, while we have met the immediate needs of the VA, moving forward we clearly need to examine the long-term forecasting problems affecting VA healthcare. When it came to light that the VA used two to three-year old budget models to project this year's budget and did not even consider the new strains on our healthcare needs from the ongoing War on Terror, I could not believe my ears. How is it that actuaries and budget analysts could possibly think we wouldn't need to re-analyze veterans' needs after we have sent troops to fight two wars? In a time of international conflict, the VA must constantly update their cost projections to account for wounded troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Not doing so is shortsighted and dangerous, as we have discovered the hard way.

As a Member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and the Member representing the greatest number of veterans in Congress, I will do my utmost to ensure that veterans are provided for in future budgets and future legislation. Florida's veterans deserve no less.

## **ENSURING THE SAFETY AND POTENCY OF YOUR PRESCRIPTION DRUGS**

Recently I introduced legislation to determine the shelf-life and accuracy of the labels on VA prescription drug supplies. H.R. 1149 would direct the VA Secretary to study and report to Congress on the accuracy and possible extension of expiration dates on certain prescription drugs maintained by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

A 1997 study and report at the Department of Defense (DoD) found that many drugs were inaccurately labeled, and actually could be used by patients long after the labels expiration date. Following the study, the DoD instituted new procedures, saving millions of dollars each year and ensuring that the drugs our soldiers received were of the highest quality.

The good news is that since I introduced my legislation earlier this spring, the VA has begun a study as to the expiration date accuracy of their prescription drug supply. While this is a good first step and one that should bring significant cost savings to the VA, I will continue my efforts to pass H.R. 1149 and guarantee that this will not be a one-time study and one-time cost savings. Veterans' safety and health is too important to not continue the appraisal into the future.

## **NEW LEGISLATION INTRODUCED TO PROVIDE VETERANS' MILEAGE REIMBURSEMENT**

On June 30<sup>th</sup>, I introduced legislation to help reimburse veterans who are forced to travel to hospitals and clinics outside the VA system. H.R. 3147, the *Veterans Road to Health Care Act of 2005*, will allow the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to reimburse veterans using the mileage reimbursement rates that government employees on official business use when they travel in privately owned vehicles. Veterans would be eligible for the mileage reimbursement if the travel is in connection with treatment or care for a non-service-connected disability at a non-Department facility, and the treatment or care is provided on the recommendation of medical personnel of a Department medical center or clinic.

As residents of the 5<sup>th</sup> District know, the rural nature of much of Florida's Gulf Coast often necessitates long travel to medical centers. When veterans are told by the VA clinics and hospitals that they must visit a healthcare facility far from their home, it is only appropriate for the VA to reimburse them for that out-of-pocket expense. As a Member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I will continue to seek support for my legislation and raise awareness of the issue.

## **HONORING KOREAN WAR VETERANS**

52 years ago, on July 27, 1953, the United States, North Korea and China signed an armistice that officially ended the three-year Korean War. For too many Florida veterans, the Korean War has become known as "The Forgotten War," sandwiched between World War II and Vietnam. It was the heroic efforts of our men and women in the Armed Forces, however, that helped maintain democracy and preserved the spirit of freedom for millions on the Korean Peninsula.

While the signing of the treaty may have ended the conflict, it did not end the United States' presence there. Thousands of brave men and women served in the U.S. Armed Forces during the three years of the war, as well as in the 52 years since the war ended. Today, my office is working hand in hand with local veterans groups to identify the thousands of 5<sup>th</sup> District constituents who served in Korea and deserve recognition.

To date, I have proudly presented more than 175 Korean Defense Service Medals (KDSM) and more than 400 Korean War Service Medals



**Rep. Brown-Waite Presents Medals  
to Citrus County Veterans**

(KWSM) to my veteran constituents. The Department of Defense created these medals to recognize the sacrifices and tenure of those soldiers who served the United States cause on the Korean Peninsula. It has been an honor to present my constituent heroes with these medals and to formally thank their families and them for the commitment showed and time served.

As too many Florida families sadly know, 577 soldiers from our great state died during the Korean War. They made the ultimate sacrifice in the name of life, liberty and freedom. In addition to those brave heroes, we must not forget the more than 1.8 million Americans soldiers who have served in Korea since 1950. These are the men and women who I have met and presented the KDSM to and who deserve praise for advancing the causes of democracy and freedom.

It was these brave Americans who helped stem the Communist tide in Asia. The battle for Korea helped spare Japan from the threat of Communist invasion and showed the world that the United States and its allies were prepared to resist the Communist advance. This country paid a high price in blood for the defense of Korea, but those who fell contributed much to the security we enjoy today.

Residents of the 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District can pay tribute to our veterans and fallen heroes by visiting Korean War Memorials throughout the district, including a brand new memorial that opened this spring in Groveland. Take the time to shake the hand of one of our brave soldiers and say thank you for defending my freedoms and for making the world a safer place. These men and women deserve no less for their sacrifices and commitment to freedom.

### **NEW WORLD WAR II AND VIETNAM WAR COMMEMORATIVE COINS**

In honor of the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War, and the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the end of World War II, I will acknowledge all eligible World War II and Vietnam War veterans by presenting them with a Commemorative Coin for their service. If you are a veteran of World War II or Vietnam and believe you may qualify for the coin, please contact my Brooksville office. This coin is just a small token of my gratitude to those veterans who served our country so bravely.

The two coins, pictured below, are designed to commemorate veterans' service to our country in these conflicts. I have already personally presented more than 250 of the coins to eligible veterans throughout the 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, and will present coins at future events honoring veterans this summer and fall.

To be eligible for these coins, veterans must live in the 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, have been honorably discharged from the United States Armed Services and have served in theater in either World War II or the Vietnam War. Veterans will need to provide a copy of their DD-214 or other records showing their military service time. Interested veterans should contact my Brooksville District Office at (352) 799-8354 to complete the necessary paperwork and request forms.

**World War II Coin**

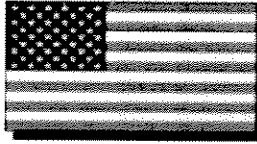


**Vietnam War Coin**



Images of the Commemorative Coins Presented by Congresswoman Brown-Waite

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**Congresswoman Ginny Brown-Waite, 20 North Main St. Brooksville, FL  
34601, toll free 1-866-GWAITE-5  
[www.house.gov/brown-waite](http://www.house.gov/brown-waite)**

Also, be sure to sign up on my Congressional Web site to receive my weekly e-newsletter. All you need to do is submit your name and e-mail address to receive it each Friday.